

Portugal 'O' Meeting – 2020

by Freya Askham

The thing about POM (Portugal Orienteering Meeting) is that everything just works! You can just relax because you know everything will be just as you expect. The arenas have a great atmosphere, the starts flow like clockwork and the final details are an example of how less is often more compared to the reams and reams we are often asked to print and read before some British events.

This was my fourth POM. Helen, Debbie and I felt like brave pioneers back in 2017, striking out on an international orienteering adventure. We've certainly learnt a great deal since then including making sure that our accommodation has heating and enough beds (or at least as many beds as promised!)

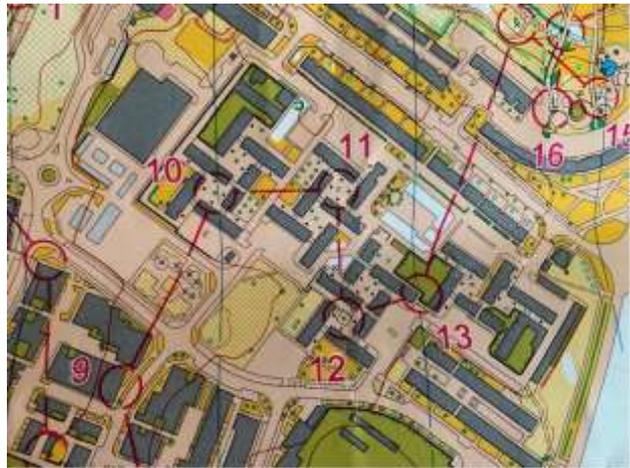
Rosie joined us again this year for her 3rd POM and we couldn't quite believe what a fantastic house we'd managed to book. Sitting right on the cliffs in the pretty coastal village of Porto Covo, we had 270-degree views of the waves crashing in from the Atlantic. The house was apparently an old firework factory and was a vision in white Scandi minimalism. A perfect haven for post-O relaxation.



Each year the format of POM varies slightly and this year our first day consisted on an Urban Middle distance race and a night sprint. Portugal was enjoying an unseasonal heat wave which we lapped up whilst relaxing but not so much whilst running. Santiago de Cacem, the event centre and urban location, is a hilly town with a castle on a hill. As we were driving into town I said, "I bet I'm the only one of us who has to run all the way to the top of that hill!" and I was right. The courses were all well planned and fun although we were all glad of a bit of shade afterwards.



We had time to nip back to the beach house between events where Rosie cooked us up some delicious tagliatelle before we headed to Vila Nova de Santo Andre for the night sprint. Usually at POM the night sprint is located in a pretty hilltop village but this year the planner went for technical difficulty over picturesque surroundings. When we arrived, the location of the finish area appeared to be a well-guarded secret, so we left Rosie trying to find it to meet us with our jackets and cheer us into the run-in. It was a very flat new town which made it fast even for sprint and I managed to get chased by a dog and start heading to my number 13 from my number 11 thinking I was already at number 12 – oops!



What a day! – We were all pretty exhausted and woke up on Sunday with very achy legs which was perfect as it was the long forest day! Our first opportunity to see what the forest terrain was like in this area (Santo Andre and Santa Cruz). It was a mixed area with some good runnable areas as well as some pretty prickly undergrowth. The paths were sandy in places and could be hard going. I had a really long leg from 8-9 which wasn't particularly technical but there were certainly parts of the course that could

catch you out. However, it was mainly the heat that I was doing battle with!

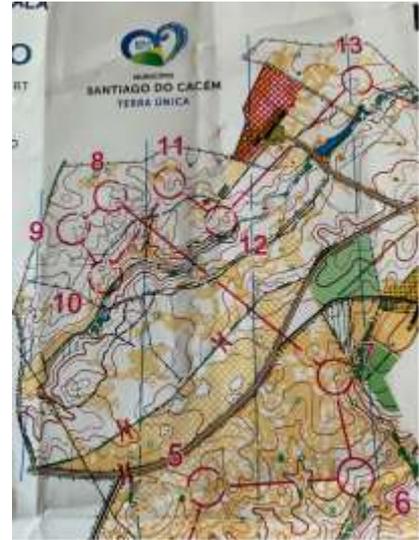
Clive Wilkinson (SUFFOC) was there to cheer me into the finish and Helen came in shortly after. We then had an exciting countdown to see if Sally (Wilkinson) would finish in time to beat Helen which she did but only just – it was very close!



Sunday afternoon was for relaxing and Rosie, Debbie and I tried out the Ice Cream Buffet in Porto Covo (basically ice cream pick'n'mix – OMG!!)

On Monday our legs seemed to be getting the idea that they needed to keep going and we had another 2 events to tackle. First was a forest middle distance and then a sprint in the afternoon! The area for the middle was more runnable than the day before with most of my control descriptions being re-entrants. I was doing really well until I missed a path, convinced myself I'd found it further up and suddenly I was lost. Luckily, I followed a fence back in the right direction, found my #9 and was able to relocate back to #8, then back to #9 and on we go!

The afternoon sprint was an addition to previous years and Sines, home to an oil refinery and container port didn't seem like a promising location but it turned out to have pretty old streets and a ruined castle. I love sprints and I really enjoyed this one despite getting rather stressed at the start when an official pinched my map for a late starter with 10 seconds to go!



For our last night Rosie rustled up a delicious chicken risotto and Helen and I had an icy paddle in the Atlantic dodging the rollers crashing in the bay. Not a place for swimming!

The last (6th!) event was another forest middle using the same parking and arena as the previous day. Clever planning meant they used pretty much the same area, but it didn't feel like it for most of the course. I managed a pretty clean run and there was a serious sense of achievement in having completed all 6 races successfully in 4 days. None of us retired or mis-punched on any of our courses – well done us!!

Results –

Urban/Forest: Freya (W45) 23rd/60, Helen (W55) 38th/68, Debbie(W60) 44th/73, Rosie(W70) 28th/52

Sprint: Freya (W45) 8th/16*, Helen(W55) 21st/31*, Debbie(W60) 23rd/36*

*totals are only those who completed both sprints

I love POM which must be evident as this was our 4th in a row. Congratulations to the organisers for such a great event where we rarely encounter a single hitch!